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SUBJECT: GOI RESPONDS TO NEW PATTERN OF CROSS-BORDER
INCURSIONS

REF: A. A) 2005 TEL AVIV 06876

[1](#)B. B) 2005 TEL AVIV 06877

[1](#)C. C) CAIRO 603

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Israeli National Police (INP) Colonel Avshalom Peled told G-TIP Reports Officer Gayatri Patel January 11 and poloff in subsequent phone conversations that his Ramon Border Police Brigade, which guards Israel's southern border with Egypt, has captured 85 Palestinians from the Gaza Strip attempting to enter Israel illegally through its border with Egypt since disengagement. Peled stressed that his brigade, which first deployed in June 2003, did not observe any attempted incursions by Gazans prior to disengagement. Peled also said that the GOI had previously allocated insufficient manpower and resources to guard its southern borders with both Egypt and Jordan, while adding that the government in January allocated significantly more personnel to address this deficiency. At any given moment, Peled reported, 50 Border Police currently protect the 208-kilometer border between Israel and Egypt, what he termed the main route for trafficking persons into Israel. Peled admitted that his brigade cannot prevent smuggling from Egypt of terrorists, firearms, explosives, women, laborers, drugs, tobacco, or refugees. In addition, Peled described the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers who guard Israel's southern border with Jordan between the Gulf of Aqaba and Ne'ot Hakikar near the Dead Sea as "not effective," alleging that "most of the heroin in Israel enters there." END SUMMARY.

FIRST PALESTINIAN INCURSIONS

[1](#)2. (C) Ramon Border Brigade Commander Avshalom Peled said that his brigade has captured 85 Palestinians from the Gaza Strip attempting to enter Israel illegally through its border with Egypt since disengagement in September 2005. Peled stressed that his brigade, which first deployed in June 2003, did not observe any attempted incursions by Gazans prior to disengagement. He said Palestinian "and foreign terrorists" increasingly seek to perform a "u-shaped movement" from Gaza south into Egypt, east across the Sinai desert, north through the Israel-Egypt border, and ultimately into the West Bank (reftels A and B). During a February 3 discussion with the Ambassador, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni asserted that this smuggling route is of increasing concern to Israel, that the Egyptians do not seem to be interested in combating it, and that the GOI would ask for funds from the USG to enhance security, in light of the Hamas victory. While Peled did not offer evidence of any foreign terrorists having actually used the route, he noted that Egyptian border guard forces are currently embroiled in combat against "jihadists" in the Sinai only 30 kilometers from the border with Israel.

[1](#)3. (C) Peled said that construction of the security fence separating the West Bank from Israel has created a sense of urgency among Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, who now realize that the fence, upon its completion, will prevent them from entering the West Bank illicitly through Israel. The southern border has consequently experienced a rise in the number of attempted incursions by Palestinians from the Gaza Strip who seek to enter the West Bank while still possible. Peled predicted a further increase in these attempts during [1](#)2006.

TRAFFICKING PEOPLE ACROSS THE ISRAEL-EGYPT BORDER

[1](#)4. (C) Peled reported that in 2005 his brigade caught 137 people being smuggled across the border, 45 of whom were women. He noted that this number represents an increase since 2004, when his brigade caught 104 people, and that he suspects the number apprehended reflects only a small proportion of the actual number of trafficked persons. "Many more were not caught," Peled admitted. He said his brigade employs an interrogator to question people caught crossing the border illegally and to commence, when appropriate, criminal investigations. The INP has trained the interrogator, Peled asserted, to identify victims of trafficking. Peled said he has just one interrogator to serve all four companies -- three Border Police and one IDF -- under his command. Although Peled reported that the INP has provided a "green light" to hire a second interrogator, he could not provide an estimate as to when this interrogator will join the brigade.

[1](#)5. (C) Peled added that the entire brigade has received clear instructions to send all women, whether or not the

interrogator believes they were trafficked, to the Immigration Authority. Officials at the Immigration Authority, he explained, have the power to decide whether to pass women determined to be trafficking victims to the care of the shelter for trafficked women. Peled mentioned that some of the traffickers smuggle people into Israel for prostitution, while others smuggle them in for labor.

16. (C) Peled emphasized that the trafficked women his brigade has caught often report abuse along the trafficking route by Bedouin and Egyptian smugglers. Peled alleged that some women have been killed and buried in the desert, but offered no specifics. In a separate meeting January 13 with poloff and Patel, INP Inspector Eli Kaplan confirmed reports of abuse. Kaplan said he conducted a "sting" operation at the border, in which he posed as an Israeli trafficker seeking women from the former Soviet Union. When the women arrived, they had been severely bruised and malnourished.

DEPLOYMENT AND RESOURCES AT THE ISRAEL-EGYPT BORDER

17. (C) Peled explained that the Border Police, also called the border guards, mainly work under the day-to-day command of the six INP districts (southern, central, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and northern). Two Border Police brigades within the INP work under IDF operational command -- one of these brigades works in Judea and Samaria, and one at the southern border with Egypt (Peled's Ramon brigade). The head of the IDF's southern command provides the Ramon brigade its overall operational guidance. Peled said his brigade includes three companies of border guards, totaling 286 personnel, and one company from the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), totaling 80 soldiers. These totals include officers and support personnel. Peled has deployed his border guard companies at Nitzana Base, near the Gaza Strip and the town of Nitzana; Har Harif Base, in the center of the border line near Mount Harif; and Shikma Base, just northwest of Eilat. He has stationed his army company at Uzia Base, located north of Eilat near Mount Uziyahu.

18. (C) Peled admitted that his brigade, first deployed in June 2003, has insufficient manpower and resources to prevent smugglers from trafficking terrorists, firearms, explosives, women, laborers, drugs, tobacco, and refugees from Egypt into Israel. Currently, at any one moment, Peled reported, 50 border guards protect a desert border of 208 kilometers.

19. (C) Peled said his brigade relies heavily on visual intelligence drawn from border guards, special cameras, and ground surveillance radars. He emphasized, however, that his brigade needs more cameras and radars. Peled's brigade borrows planes and helicopters for special operations from the Israeli Air Force or the Police Air Force. In addition, Peled said, his brigade employs Bedouin trackers to pursue smugglers in the desert. In 2005, Peled reported, the Ramon brigade developed a new strategy to address the increase in cross-border smuggling. The strategy requires the unit to deploy more forces, use more surveillance devices, develop better aerial surveillance, utilize sniffer dogs, improve cooperation with the Egyptians, and begin collaborating with the tax authorities to punish Israeli citizens who purchase smuggled goods.

REINFORCEMENTS PLANNED FOR THE SOUTH

110. (C) Despite his persistent complaints about lack of resources, Peled expressed optimism about "major changes" that he claimed are coming soon. He ascribed these changes to disengagement, saying that the IDF will now redeploy to the southern border soldiers who formerly served in the Gaza Strip. Peled claimed, however, that soldiers serve less effectively as border guards than do policemen, because IDF companies receive less professional training for border protection than do their police counterparts, and often the army units comprise many young and inexperienced conscripts. Use of these units appeals to policy makers, Peled added, because they cost the government less money than do professional Border Police.

111. (C) DAO contacts have reported that the IDF has already redeployed an army brigade that previously served in the Gaza Strip to support the Ramon brigade. Peled subsequently confirmed that an IDF Colonel who shares his name (Avi Peled) moved January 2 to the border with his regional army brigade, comprising approximately 700 people. This army brigade now covers the area between Ezuz and the Gaza Strip, while the Ramon brigade guards the area from Ezuz south to Eilat. Peled reported that by February 16 another army brigade will deploy to reinforce the Ramon brigade along the whole border between Har Harif and Eilat.

112. (U) Note: The Israeli Government Press Office reported that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon visited the Israel-Egypt border November 29 along with senior members of his cabinet. "There is no difference between criminal and security infiltrations," Sharon announced. Sharon described the GOI's attempt to improve border protection as an "urgent and immediate mission." End note.

THE SOUTHERN ISRAEL-JORDAN BORDER

113. (C) Commander Peled explained that the IDF currently deploys a battalion of approximately 300 soldiers to protect Israel's southern border with Jordan between the Gulf of Aqaba and Ne'ot Hakikar. "I can say for sure the soldiers are not effective," Peled said. "They don't catch anything over there," he claimed. "It's a less active border, but there is infiltration there, especially hard drugs like heroin. Most of the heroin in Israel enters there." Peled said he does not know the extent to which terrorists or trafficked persons enter through the southern border with Jordan. (Note: Embassy Amman reports that it hears from both Israelis and Jordanians that the GOI is generally content with the security cooperation they receive from the GOJ along the Israel-Jordan border. End note.)

114. (C) Peled said that the failure to adequately guard the southern Jordanian border has led the police to instruct him to write a staff paper explaining how to build the same sort of protection on the southern Jordan-Israel border that he has developed for the Egypt-Israel border. Peled said that by the end of 2006, he will take over command of the southern Jordan-Israel border, and he hopes to strengthen the police component of the border's protection. Peled said he also expects the IDF to augment the border's forces with an army brigade from the Gaza Strip, which he explained contains more soldiers and resources than does a police brigade; he hopes to have at least 1,000 soldiers assigned to guard the border under his command.

THE BEDOUIN SMUGGLERS

115. (C) Bedouin tribes do not recognize the Israel-Egypt border, Peled explained, since they believe it was artificially imposed on their pre-existing communities, which straddle the current line. Peled said the Bedouin tribes have clearly delineated their areas of operation on the Egyptian side of the border, to the extent that some leaders tax rival smugglers who traverse their territory. Smuggling is the only source of income for some Bedouin communities, Peled reported. Since the border stretches along 208 kilometers of desert, Peled said, smugglers consider each trip to be "low risk."

116. (C) Usually two to ten smugglers are operating at any time, Peled said, often on foot or on camel, though they also sometimes use vehicles, including a lead vehicle, an operations vehicle, a rescue vehicle, and a closing vehicle. They always employ forward observation, Peled said, usually with radio contact and even command posts. He also said they use tactical diversions to distract mobile units of border guards.

THE EGYPTIANS

117. (C) According to the 1978 Camp David accords and the 1979 Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel, Egypt may deploy only civilian police units in the eastern Sinai near the Egyptian border with Israel. Israel and Egypt signed a memorandum of understanding in fall 2005 permitting deployment of 750 new Egyptian Border Guard Forces along the Gaza-Egypt border to augment the lightly-armed police troops called for in the peace treaty. Peled complained that the Egyptian police are ineffective, alleging that they sometimes accept bribes from smugglers or traffickers. According to Peled, the Israelis receive no cooperation whatsoever from the Egyptians to prevent smuggling. (Note: Embassy Cairo reports that the GOE argues that Israel refuses to entertain Egypt's request to further supplement its Border Guard Forces along the Egypt-Gaza border with another battalion in order to adequately address the smuggling challenge. The GOE contends, according to Embassy Cairo, that its success rate in deterring smuggling rose dramatically since its BGF deployment along the Gaza-Egypt border, per LTG Dayton's discussions with Minister of Defense Tantawi and DMI Mowafi in Cairo last week (reftel C). End note.)

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JONES